



Is freedom female?

What's Freedom got to do with Women?

This course, “No Woman, No Revolution”, problematises the necessity of involving women, who are more than one-half of humanity, in any possible proletarian revolution against capitalism.

The proletarian revolution, as much as the National Democratic Revolution that precedes it, is a struggle for freedom, conforming to the slogan “Power to the People”.

In that sense, the entire 16 courses of the Communist University are “about” freedom. Communism itself is all about freedom. The revolutionary Christopher Caudwell called

freedom “the good that contains all other goods”. One could presume that there are no opponents to this view. Countless writings praising freedom, and works of art like the colossal Statue of Liberty in New York, USA, seem to deny the possibility of any other view. Freedom is for women as much as for men.

But in fact, as soon as the appeal to freedom becomes effective in securing support for the struggle for socialism, bourgeois thinkers and writers find ways to abandon it, and even to condemn it.

We now come across this phenomenon – the refusal of freedom – in the matter of women’s power in society, just as we have come across it elsewhere in relation to the liberation of Africa from colonialism.

For an example of the latter, the first President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, discusses the “negritude” that the first President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor believed in, as follows:

‘Senghor has, indeed, given an account of the nature of the return to Africa. His account is highlighted by statements using some of his own words: that the African is "a field of pure sensation"; that he does not measure or observe, but "lives" a situation; and that this way of acquiring "knowledge" by confrontation and intuition is "negro-African"; the acquisition of knowledge by reason, "Hellenic". In African Socialism [London and New York,

1964, pp.72-3], he [Senghor] proposes “that we consider the Negro-African as he faces the Other: God, man, animal, tree or pebble, natural or social phenomenon. In contrast to the classic European, the Negro-African does not draw a line between himself and the object, he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it. After holding it at a distance, after scanning it without analysing it, he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill or fix it. He touches it, feels it, smells it. The Negro-African is like one of those Third Day Worms, a pure field of sensations... Thus the Negro-African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis.”

‘It is clear that socialism cannot be founded on this kind of metaphysics of knowledge.’

Kwame Nkrumah, “African Socialism Revisited”, 1967

In similar fashion to Senghor, when confronted with the possibility of freedom and power, the philosopher [Judith Butler](#) rejects it. For Butler, power is an unwanted, male imposition. Similarly, for Senghor, subjective freedom is “Hellenic” and therefore to be rejected because it is identified with the colonial oppressor.

We have seen three contradictions that are active in the world of feminism. One is between the bourgeois and the

proletarian feminists. The second is between the organised and the structureless. The third is between the search for freedom, and its contrary: rejection of autonomy.

All of these contradictions are related. As in others among the CU courses, we have to conclude that the resolution of such contradictions requires philosophy, and not just any philosophy but the most powerful, avant-guard kind of philosophy.

[James Heartfield](#)'s 2002 work, "The Death of the Subject Explained" is a strong book that deals with the fundamental question of all philosophy: the relation of mind to matter. In it, Heartfield debunks all kinds of anti-rational, anti-humanist philosophy, including post-Modernism, and in the attached extract, he counters the anti-humanist feminism of Butler and others.

Humanist simply means acceptance that the combined ability to observe, think, plan and act is the unique attribute of human beings, and is also the source of human morality.

The very first words of matured Marxism – Karl Marx's 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach" – deal with this fundamental question of subject and object, mind and matter. The first sentence of Thesis 1 on Feuerbach is:

"The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the Object, actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of

the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively.”

Suffice it to say that Marx here shows his principal concern, which never wavered or varied, namely: the priority of human freedom. So long as we remain Marxists, we would have to insist on freedom as our goal, as the goal of humanity, and as the goal of women.

Whereas bourgeois feminists like Butler and others quoted by Heartfield have ended up opposing freedom.

On this kind of feminism Heartfield concludes:

“What began as a criticism of the monopoly over freedom exercised by men has turned, paradoxically, into a criticism of freedom as such.”

We can also say, paraphrasing Nkrumah: *‘It is clear that revolution cannot be founded on this kind of metaphysics of knowledge.’*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Heartfield, On Feminists on The Subject, 2002](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).